

Ottis **TASKEL** Williams

The Blessed Father of an Alabama Family

Ottis Taskel“Ott” Williams

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Summary Biography



Ottis Taskel "Ott" Williams (September 3, 1919 - October 15, 2008) was an Alabama insurance manager, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. After growing up on a farm in rural Crenshaw County, Alabama, during the Great Depression, he married Mattie Pearl Bailey (November 13, 1923 - June 12, 2009) and served four years in the U.S. Army. Having lived almost next door to each other during their childhood the two were married for 65 years. They had two sons, Wayne Lavon Williams (September 2, 1945 -) and Ricky Lynn Williams (October 30, 1949 -).

Williams started his family in 1943 in Brantley, Alabama, and moved sequentially to Elba, Alabama, Andalusia, Alabama, Panama City, Florida, Troy, Alabama, and, finally, Dothan, Alabama.



Dedication

My father was a glorious example of what God can do with a human life. He was raised hard on a farm in difficult circumstances during The Great Depression. He learned intolerance from his own father who struggled to raise ten children in a crowded Alabama farmhouse. But my father changed with the times. He worked hard to raise his own family and to give his sons opportunities he never had himself. He became a Christian as a young man and taught Sunday School in Baptist churches most of his life. The intolerance of his youth gave way to empathy, charity, and love. He became an amazing father, husband, and grandfather, and he gave far more to the world than what was ever given to him.

As with all biographies, the one that follows is a frail attempt to describe the character of a human being. I wrote a Father's Day tribute to my father in 2013, five years after his death, and I've included it here as a Dedication because I believe it provides a beautiful and accurate account of the kind of man my father was.

"The blue object on the bench is a 95 year old rusty pulley that I sanded and painted blue. My father's family used it to hang hogs for bleeding out and gutting. It's a pulley they used many times during the Great Depression to help feed the family of 12 in their three bedroom farm house. He always bore the scars of poverty and was not proud of his childhood. But I was. He left that farm at 17, joined the army, and married my mother who was raised just down the road from that old farm house. He taught me how to play baseball, to fish, and to always say "yes sir and no sir" to adults. With barely a high school education, he was an extremely intelligent man with more common sense and wisdom than I will ever hope to have. He worked hard to put his two boys into the University of Alabama and paid for most of my education. He taught Sunday school in First Baptist Church of Dothan and other Baptist churches for most of his life. He was a loving



Rick Williams and his father
in Mobile, Alabama 12/23/2004

husband to my mother for 65 years before leaving to be with Our Lord just 8 months before my mother did the same.

I only saw my father cry 3 times in my entire life. The first time was when they wheeled my mother into surgery for her hysterectomy. She looked up at us from the stretcher as the anesthesiologist made her groggy and said "y'all go eat breakfast now" and that made him cry. Another time was at the funeral of his mother. And the third time was when he was 88. I walked into his bedroom at 8 AM. He had been eagerly sitting there with suitcase packed for two hours. I had just been on the phone and gave him the good news that the surgeons in Birmingham had called and told me they had the go-ahead to remove his kidney and 18 inches of his GI tract the next day. There was a high probability he would die in the surgery but if he survived they would remove most of the cancer. When I asked him why he was crying that morning of the possibly good news he said, "I just don't want to leave your mother" and kept on crying. You see, my mother had Alzheimer's and if he didn't survive the surgery it would leave her alone in that distant and vacant world.

We live in a world of wonderful fathers. Mine is now with many others in Heaven and there's nothing I wouldn't give to be able to sit with him on my porch and just talk for an hour. To just tell him I love him one more time and tell him about my troubles and get his advice, and tell him about the good things that have happened with me since he's been gone, things that would make him proud. And to let him know I'm trying hard to be the son I should have been when he was here. I miss and dearly love my father." Rick Williams

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Section 1: Historical Biography

Primary Source: Rick Williams, Son

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Chapter 1. Birth and Early Childhood: Life On a Farm During the Great Depression

Born to Jaspar Jack Williams and Gonnie Dot Smith Williams on September 3, 1919, Ottis Tascal Williams



The Williams Home circa 1940

(Photograph: 1985, Rick Williams)

was one of ten children. He was raised on a farm near Dozier, Alabama, during the Great Depression. The local community was called "Burnout" and it was about 5 miles from Brantley, Al. The times were hard, especially for a family that large with no source of income other than from the sale of farm products. Whatever food they ate, they had to raise. Corn, beans, peas, tomatoes, cane syrup, potatoes, chicken, hogs, and cows were some of their staples. Many of their clothes were made from cotton that they grew in the fields. Their families would preserve the meat from the animals they butchered by hanging it in a smokehouse over the winter. They drank water from a well they pumped by hand. They made their own "lye" soap. Their mothers and aunts would hold quilting bees, rotating turns between families.

At this point I want to fast forward about 80 years. It's 2009. My father and mother had both passed away in the last year. I'm at their home in Dothan, Alabama, cleaning it out for the last time. All the furniture had

been sold or moved. Every item in every closet and cabinet in the house had been sorted through and everything not wanted by my brother and I had been discarded. I was just there one final time to fill a few more trash bags and haul them to the road. My father had a small desk in the den and there was a cabinet above the desk where he kept most of his financial papers and other important items. That cabinet was the first thing I cleaned out when I started 5 weeks prior. I had been there 3 previous times to clear things out. Each time I was there I sorted through everything in that cabinet, just as a precaution. There were insurance policies, bibles, calendars, bank records, and other documents, some probably placed there as far back as 40 years. I was thorough in the previous 3 visits and nothing remained in that cabinet other than one stack of papers that I had thumbed through at least twice before. I took the stack and was putting it in a trash bag when I noticed a yellow legal pad. I was surprised to see my father's handwriting on eight pages. ***It was a letter he had written to his only grandchild 30 years before when Wes was only 3 or 4 years old!*** Evidently he had intended for it to be given to Wes at some point in his life but it was lost in his failing memory in his final days. The letter to Wes described what it was like being raised on a farm back in the 1920's. It was important to him and he loved his grandson enough to take time to write about some memories that were dear to him. ***It began with the earliest memory that he ever had.*** I've transcribed it here as well as copies of the originals.

For Wes About 4 Years Old

Being raised on a farm the first thing I remember was being put in a basket. The basket was a cotton basket – round with sides about 1 1/2 feet high. We had company and while in the basket my father and mother chased and caught a chicken to cook for lunch.

I believe I was 3 1/2 to 4 years old at the time. We lived way out in the country on a farm that my father and mother cultivated. They grew corn, cotton, and a few peanuts along with garden items such as onions, potatoes, cabbage, peas, beans, turnips, etc. This was about the year 1923 or 1924.

The first school I remember was a one room schoolhouse. I visited this school with my two older brothers. I thought it was nice. We played games at recess and at the lunch hour. All classes up to 6th grade were in one room. Class session would come up and sit on a long bench. Other classes would be studying. We had to walk about 3 miles to this school.

My older brothers carried our lunch in a one gallon bucket. This bucket had been used for cane syrup. Our lunch consisted of biscuits baked by our mother that morning. Also baked sweet potatoes, cornbread, and bacon or ham. There was no light bread as we know of it today.

At lunch time all kids went outside to eat. We ate under a large oak or hickory tree. After eating we played games. This was neat since we played in edge of woods which surrounded the school on three sides. Water was obtained from a creek about 100 yards from school. Water came from a spring. After school we walked the 3 miles back home.

We played along the road, got dirty playing in the sand and mud. There were no paved roads at this time. I had not seen a car at this time although there were some cars in the cities. Transportation was by wagon or buggies. Roads were sandy and clay caused by these mules and wagons going over them so many times.

We had moved from the house where I was in the cotton basket. We moved to a house about 1/2 mile from my grandfather and grandmother. They were the parents of my mother. Their names were Will Smith and Rebecca Elizabeth (Butler) Smith. He was a successful farmer and had a large house—barn for mules and cows—smoke house for meat, wagon house for wagon, buggies, and farming tools.

Farmers in those days killed hogs for meat. They scalded the hogs in a large barrel, scraped the hair off, then hung them on a large pole and butchered them. Bacon slabs were hung with bear grass in the smoke house. Hams were hung and smoked but most of the time they were packed with salt and layed on pine limbs in the smoke house to cure for a few days. At that time they were smoked or cut up and packed in barrels or 5 gal containers for future use. Beef (young yearlings) were butchered as needed. Usually beef were taken on mules and wagons after being butchered and sold or given away.

The house we lived in at this time was about 3/4 miles across a meadow from my Grandfather Smith. Cows, mules, and live stock grazed in the meadow. A ditch or gully ran through the meadow. It was 4 to 7 feet deep with a bridge across on the lower side. I played in the gully with my brothers. This was about 1924 or 1925.

Paw Paw Smith house was a large one with a breezeway that went through the house. It had a large front porch with a water bucket with a dipper. Everyone drank from the cedar bucket and used same dipper. Grandmother would bake ginger bread cakes and tea cakes. They were very good and I loved to go there to play on the long porch, in the hall, and eat grandmother's cookies.

Grandfather had a well that water for drinking and general use was drawn from. I don't know of any pumps at this time. Water was obtained from wells and springs. From grandfather's well there was a trough that was connected to a log hollow in the barn. I liked to watch my grandfather draw the water from the well, pour it into the trough, and it run in the trough to the barn and into the hollow log to water the stock. Sometimes I would try to outrun the water as it ran down the trough to the barn.

Across the meadow was our house. It was smaller and near the woods. We got our water for drinking and other uses at a spring. This spring was located under a hill some 100 yards from our house. The spring came out from

under the hill and it was clear, cold, pure water. Since we did not have flash lights we had to get enough water late in the evening to last until the next day.

At that time I don't recall any barb wire or wire fences. Fences were made out of rails about 8 to 10 feet long. Rails were split from heart of long leaf pine. They were layed in a zig zag one over the other until they were about 4 feet high, or high enough to keep stock in. There was a rail fence near the meadow and I liked to play along it.

We always had chickens and hogs. The chickens were not fenced in or caged. They ran loose all the time. I loved to chase them until they ran into the woods. We also had turkeys and guineas. In spring time turkeys and guineas would hide their nest in woods and fields and along fence rows. It was fun finding their nest.

We moved to another farm some 3 or 4 miles away from my grandfather. I still got to go to my Grandparents Smith and play. My other Grandfather and Grandmother Williams live on farm next to Grandfather Smith. They had a large barn with mules in it. It had a loft and I liked to play in this loft on the hay and corn.

Both Grandparents had large yards. We played cat ball and when there were enough cousins we played baseball. Other games were hail-over. We would throw ball over house and if it was caught we would rush around the house and hit as many of the other players with the ball that we could. If they were hit they were on our side. This was not a baseball but a string ball made out of cloth. Usually the ball was made from a sock that was unraveled. We also played hide and seek.

At this time I had to start to school. This was from when weather was pretty because we had to walk three or four miles to school. If weather was bad or cold we still walked.

That was where the letter ended. I don't know why it ended there. At that time my parents were getting to keep Wes fairly often so my father may have been too occupied with him and then just forgot as time went by. They loved to take him to their cabin at Lake Gantt or just keep him in Dothan for a weekend. He was the joy of their life. I've included copies of the original letter on the next few pages, as well as a picture of my father and Wes at about the time the letter was written.



At their cabin on Gantt Lake with Wesat about age 4.

For¹ Wes
About 4 yrs old

Being Raised ON A FARM - The first thing I remember was being PUT IN A basket. The basket WAS A COTTEN basket - round with side about 1 1/2 feet high. We had company AND while in the basket my father & mother chased and caught A chicken To Cook For Lunch.

I believe I WAS 3 1/2 TO 4 yrs old AT This Time. We lived way out in country ON A farm THAT my father & mother cultivated. They grew corn, cotton AND A few plants along with garden items, such AS onions, potatoes, cabbage, peas, beans, turnips etc. This was About The year 1923 or 1924.

The first school I remember was A 1 room school house. I visited This school with my two older brothers. I thought it was nice. We played games AT recess and AT the lunch hour. All classes UP TO 6th grade was in one room. CLASS IN session would come UP AND sit ON A long bench. Other classes would be studying. We had To walk About 3 mi To This school.

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had been used for ~~Cane~~ syrup.
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Chapter 2. Teen Years: Working on the Farm to Help Feed the Family

There is not much information on my father's life when he was in his teens. All we know is that it was very hard. He was age 10 at the beginning of The Great Depression in 1929 and he was 20 when it ended. He said there was hardly ever any money to be seen. At Christmas the children would receive "an orange or maybe some stick candy when it was available". His mother would have made their clothes and most of them would have been hand-me-downs. I'm not sure but I think he once mentioned that he actually walked to school barefoot. I don't know if that was as a child or as a teen. They didn't have indoor plumbing and everyone used the same outhouse. They all worked in the fields. They picked cotton, picked peanuts, picked butterbeans and peas, hoed, and plowed. My mother often told us how hard it was working in the fields back then.

Fishing and hunting were part of their everyday lives because they required the meat for food. I know this is how my father developed his lifelong love for fishing. It was a joy when his father, whom the grandkids called Papa Williams, would take any of them out of the fields to go fishing. They also fished at night on rivers and sometimes set out trot lines. There must have been enough money for shotgun shells because they hunted for squirrels, turkey, quail, dove, and other animals. It's likely that they made their own shells. They also set out traps of different kinds. I'm not sure what they were trapping.

A life like that would be considered harsh poverty today but it wasn't really considered poverty back then. Most farm families lived the same way unless they were extremely prosperous. Papa Williams was very strict on his kids. He wasn't one to spare the rod. But that being said, they all loved and respected him. He was a good man, just a hard one. But he and Mama Williams raised their family with good values. Of the 10 children, 8 of them married and never divorced, including my father.

There is one thing about my father during this time that is very notable. I once asked my Aunt Gno what it was like back then living in a house without electricity with 10 raucous kids and what my father was like. She said everyone was about as well behaved as you could expect. And Ottis? , she said "he would go sit in a corner somewhere with a book". I'm assuming that he had to read with an oil lamp. I've told earlier about the one room school house that he attended as a child. And Brantley High School, where he graduated in 1937, was probably not a good academic school back then. But my father was very smart. He could talk intelligently with anyone. His love for reading was passed on to his boys. One received a Law Degree and the other received a Master's Degree in Human Physiology. I'm positive that my father could have attended and graduated from a major college if he had been given the opportunity. When he and his wife first set out to build a family, one of their top priorities was for their boys to receive a college education.

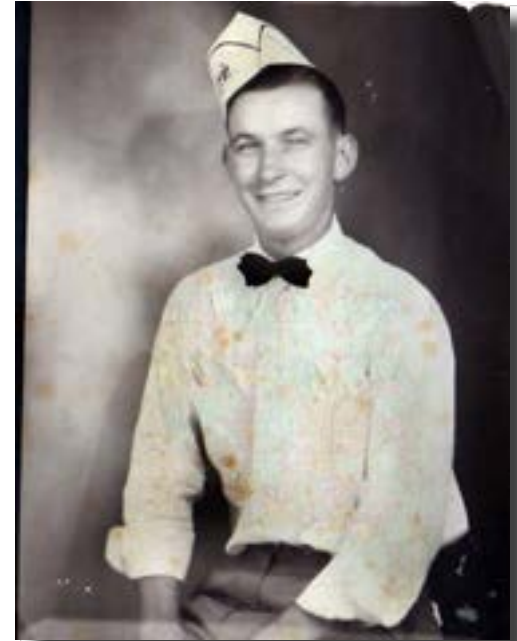
My father was also a top baseball player at Brantley High School. When he was in his early 20's he also played what they called "semi-pro" baseball back then on community teams. When someone would make a good play or hit a home run they would "pass the hat" in the stands to take up a collection for him.

Chapter 3. Leaving the Farm to Join the Army

My father left home when he must have been 17, just before his senior year in high school. He never told me about it. I just have some limited information from what his sister, my Aunt Gnovel, told me. I think there was a dispute between him and Papa Williams. I don't know the circumstances but I do know that Papa Williams ruled with an iron hand. At some point my father probably grew old enough that he didn't want to be controlled anymore. He left and went to stay with his older brother, Quinton Pascal Williams, in Ft. Meade, Florida. At some point he returned home and graduated from Brantley High School.

After high school he joined the army and I think he was sent to basic training in South Carolina. This would have been at about the time of the build-up to World War II. All I know is that he was stationed in Puerto Rico and worked as a cook at the Army base there. He also played baseball on the Army baseball team in Puerto Rico. The only thing I can really remember that he told me about that time in his life was that people would sometimes approach him and ask him for his autograph—because he looked just like Roy Rogers!

He did have an Army buddy named Albert Reeves. Albert was the sergeant in charge of the National Guard Armory in Elba, Al. I don't know if they met while in the Army or after my parents moved to Elba, but Albert became his lifetime best friend.



Photograph of unknown origin, but probably when he was working as an Army cook in either Puerto Rico or Greenville, South Carolina

Chapter 4: A Happy Marriage to the Girl Next Door

The photograph of the Williams home in Chapter 1 is the house my father lived in when he was in his teens. At the time the photograph was taken, circa 1985, the house had been unoccupied for a couple of decades. It was probably built by my grandfather Jasper Jackson Williams although I don't know how. His was a family of farmers, not carpenters and there probably wasn't much money to build a house with at that time. It's possible that my grandfather may have sold some farm land to pay for it. In that era, the 1920's and 30's, it was probably a very nice house.

The house was located on a dirt road between Burnout and (I think) Rose Hill, Alabama. I mention this because my mother's family lived in a similar house on the same road not too far away. I imagine their homes were only maybe 1/2 mile apart and probably had no other homes in between. The Baileys were farmers at that time also. My father was 4 years older than my mother and I don't think they started dating until my mother was about 17. I remember my mother told me that on their first date (possibly to a dance) her father walked ahead of them holding a lantern as they walked to and from wherever they went that night! That's a happy memory. I don't think my grandfather did that with his other two daughters as they were a good bit younger than my mother and times had changed.

I don't have much more information about their courtship. I remember once talking with my mother about country music star Hank Williams and was surprised when she told me that she had actually heard him play at a club. This was especially interesting because my mother never drank. But I think clubs in that day were different and this may have even been a teenage club. It was in Opp, Alabama and I want to say it may have been called "The Tiger Den". But I do remember that she said she heard him there along with his band "The Driftin' Cowboys". She said she went there on a date but not with my father. When I questioned her about that I think she said it was when he was in the service and they were not going together at that time. I think maybe they started dating when he came home on leave from the Army but then he left again before they became serious. I think she was 17 or 18, had finished the 11th grade at Brantley High School, and had started working at the sewing factory there in Brantley.

They were married at Pine Level Baptist Church on August 15, 1943 (see a copy of their marriage record on a page of their Bible in the Documents Section). I believe their first place of residence was in an apartment in the top of the Brantley Bank building. At that time my mother had started working at the Sewing Factory in

Their life at that time reminds me of the movie "An Officer and a Gentleman" where the Naval Officer returned to marry the girl he loved who seemed destined to work in a factory like many of her friends. That's probably the way it was with my parents. I remember my mother telling me how hard it was working in the sewing factory back then and that it was such a menial job. I just have a feeling that my father saved her from that. After 8/15/1943 they lived in that bank building for a short time and then she went to Greenville, South Carolina with him to live on the Army base there.



The Army private and his new wife



At some point my father was stationed at the Army base in Puerto Rico. I don't know if that was before being stationed in Greenville or after, but I suspect it was after. I do have a little information about his life in Greenville because I found a diary that my mother kept back then. Please refer to her Biography, Mattie Pearl Bailey Williams, for that information. The address where they lived was: 415 East North St, Greenville, SC. I know that my father worked as a cook at one time when he was in the Army. Again, I'm not sure if it was in Greenville or Puerto Rico or both. It was probably in

Greenville because in her diary my mother mentioned that he would cook for her sometimes. It's also interesting that she worked in a bakery there which I believe was the "Federal Bake Shop". They both would have been working as cooks! That being said, I never knew my father to be much of a cook other than for outdoor bar-b-q. My mother was an amazing cook, having learned country cooking from her mother.

As mentioned before, when my father was in Puerto Rico he also played 2nd base on the Army baseball team there. He was a great baseball fan and he knew a lot about the early greats of the game from Ty Cobb to Ted Williams. He taught my brother and me how to play baseball before we entered the first grade.

Chapter 5. Building a Family and a Career in Elba, Alabama

At somepoint after the Army they moved to Elba, Alabama where he was hired on as an agent for Liberty National Life Insurance Company. He rented a house on the outskirts of town in an area called Brunson Hill. His first son, Wayne Lavon Williams, was born while they were living there. It was probably a great place for my brother to grow up because it was just up the street from the city swimming pool. The pool was very close to the Pea River which ran through Elba and I think they could fish off the bridge near the pool.



The beautiful young mother with her first child, Wayne.

He was a hard worker and made enough money to build a new house just inside the city limits on the other side of town, a beautiful 3 bedroom brick home with spacious front and back yards.

This is where the family was living when I was born in 1949. He planted a nice garden in the back and my mother kept her family of four happy eating fresh vegetables. The family attended a small Baptist church, Whitewater Baptist, where my father was ordained as a deacon.

It was a good time in his life. We lived there until I had finished the first grade and my brother would have finished 6th grade. I remember playing baseball and football in that large front yard. The lady next door, Mrs. Lee, had a horse that we loved to pet. We had a dog named Chipper.

Christmas was wonderful. We had an electric Santa Claus face and my father would climb up on the roof and put it in the top of chimney each year. We had a stereo which played 78 and 45 RPM records. My favor-



a

ite at Christmas was “Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer” and “Frosty the Snowman”. The radio was a big thing because we didn’t have a television until around 1953 or 1954. I barely remember when we got that first black and white TV. There may have been only one station back then, WSFA in Montgomery.



1945: Family of 3

Elba was only 20 miles from Brantley and we had many trips to see the grandparents there. There were a lot of good times with aunts, uncles, and cousins. My mother was one of six children and my father was one of ten.



1950: Family of 4

High school football games were a big deal in Alabama towns back then. The four of us would go and take wool Army blankets to stay warm. We would take parched peanuts and eat them at the games. The Elba Yellow Jackets usually had a real good team. They had a great player at that time named Marlon Dyess who later on played at the University of Alabama. That may be why my family has always been Alabama fans and why my brother and I graduated from there.



The Williams Family
in 1952



1956: The Last Year in Elba

Chapter 6. A Good Salesman Earns a Promotion

As a young man in his mid 20s, my father was in a great part of his life when he lived in Elba. Having learned to work hard on a farm he knew how to work hard in his first real job as an insurance agent. But he also succeeded in that job because he had an intellect and personality that people liked and respected. He related to ordinary people really well and he sold a product that was really important to families back then. He had a beautiful wife, two young sons, a late model car, and a new home that he and his wife designed. He was doing extremely well for a country boy raised on a farm!

All of these things came together and it became apparent to his supervisors that he should be teaching other men how to sell life insurance. A promotion followed in 1956 and he had to move his family to Andalusia, Alabama. He settled there for 6 years working as an assistant manager of the district office of Liberty National Life Insurance Company. He first rented a house on McRaney Loop which was not far from East Three Notch Elementary School and Andalusia High School where his boys entered the 2nd and 7th grades. It was another good time in his life. He was making more money and having more success in management. Andalusia was a wonderful place for his boys. The schools were excellent and we knew almost all of the other kids in town. A group of them lived in our neighborhood and we were always playing football in the Krudolph family's large front yard or shooting bb guns or playing with my wonderful and lovable dog Lady. I soon started in Midget League Baseball and my brother was in Babe Ruth League. Later on, I made the All Star team twice in Little League and my brother became a starting 2nd baseman on the Andalusia High School team. He was also a starter on the football, basketball, and track teams.



The two brothers in their All Star uniforms
circa 1961

After living on McRaney Loop for about 3 years my mother and father built another brick home, this time in a new subdivision called Bellwood. That home and that neighborhood were fabulous places for us boys to live. I could roam all over that ~20 acre neighborhood with my bb gun and my dog Lady. There were several vacant lots to play on and there was a great little creek in a wooded area where we could play and swing on vines. We had a basketball goal set up on a lot across the street. We played "corkball" in our carport. It was sort of like baseball but we used a broomstick for a bat and a cork covered with tape for a ball. We also played whiffle ball. Roscoe's Grocery wasn't too far away. One of my favorite toys was my chemistry set and I built my own little lab in the cellar of the house. We kept our mother busy running us to and from school and to ball practice and ball games. Our father sometimes helped coach my Little League team and he also filled in as an umpire. He made me mad almost to tears once when he called me out on strikes. I remember telling him, "But Daddy I could feel it brush across my socks!" (meaning that the pitch was so low that it wasn't a strike). I will say that in my childhood there wasn't much better than putting on that baseball uniform and playing in a game. I would get ready for those games hours in advance.

Chapter 7. A Manager is Needed for a Struggling Insurance District in Florida

The company my father worked for was founded in Alabama and at some point began to open offices in other states. One of the district offices in the Florida Panhandle was located in Panama City. The district had never performed well in terms of sales and different managers had come and gone. Nonetheless it was a great



The family in 1964

honor when my father was promoted as manager of that district in 1963. The smart farmboy would now hold a position usually reserved for college graduates. We had to leave the new home and small town we loved and move hours away from the places my parents were raised. But it wasn't at all bad. Everyone was excited to go to Panama City because it had those beautiful beaches and was such a popular place to vacation. We had gone there on vacation many times. Plus, my mother had a sister who lived there with her family. Her name was Mary Ellen Bailey Cornett and she was married to George Huey Cornett. They had two small children at that time, Lisa and Jeffrey. Aunt Mary Ellen and Uncle Huey were both from Brantley and had "migrated" to Panama City to work as teachers. When we moved there in 1963 my uncle was serving as the assistant principal at Everitt Junior High

School.

So it was a great situation. My father was now a manager. My mother was close to her sister. And my brother and I got to live in teen paradise, although he only spent one summer there before enrolling in the University of Alabama. We even rented a home in The Cove with a small swimming pool. I immediately made friends with some of the boys in the neighborhood, most of whom played sports at Jenks Junior High

School where I would soon enroll in the 8th grade. I had moved from a school with 300 junior high school kids to a much larger one with 1400 kids. I started on the football team and also played basketball. The following year I started at quarterback for the first 2 games of the season and played defensive back for the remainder of the season. I also started at guard on the basketball team. That all bought me a lot of attention and a lot of friends. I was also doing really well academically, especially in algebra.

We had two great years in Panama City even though that job didn't work out for my father. He and my uncle were excellent fishermen and we caught a lot of fish in the local bays and creeks. My uncle also introduced us to gathering scallops which became one of my favorite things because I got to snorkel in salt water. My uncle and I would use masks to look for the scallops and my father, who was unaccustomed to snorkeling, would just feel for them with his feet. We always got a good haul and usually took them back to my uncle's house in Lynn Haven and cleaned them. Then my aunt and mother would cook us an incredibly delicious seafood supper. I loved spending time there because my aunt and uncle were such really nice and smart people. Our families got along real well and shared whatever fish or scallops we caught. Lisa and Jeffrey were very small at that time and just as cute as they could be.

My older brother was admitted to the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa as a freshman in 1963. He almost immediately met his future wife, Nancy Tate, and they were married in Fairfield, AL, in 1966. They have been married for 50 years at the time of this writing (2016) and have had an amazing life together. Wayne went to Law School at the University and became one of the most successful attorneys to ever practice law in Tuscaloosa County. He also served as the Tuscaloosa County District Attorney. Nancy started out teaching but later on worked in administration at the University. She was the perfect wife for an attorney, helping him both socially and professionally in many ways. It's also worth noting that in the Nick Saban era of Alabama football, Wayne became the unofficial attorney for the Alabama football



Wayne with fiancée Nancy Tate
circa 1965

players, always helping them if necessary. In the early 80's they adopted my nephew, Weston Tate Williams, when he was only 3 days old. Wes was the cutest and happiest little boy on the planet. He was my parents' only grandchild and was probably the greatest joy of their life. Later on in life he served in the highest level of the US Army Special Forces, fought in Iraq, was awarded two Bronze Stars, and became a Major at the early age of 33.

Ultimately the job in Panama City didn't work out for my father because sales were just not good in that district so he took a transfer back to Alabama as an associate manager again. We went to Troy this time, which was back in the southeastern area of Alabama that we were accustomed to and not too far from Crenshaw County and the red clay banks of Alabama.

Chapter 8. Transferred to Dothan to Complete His Career

The stay in Troy was short. I started the 10th grade at Charles Henderson High School. We rented a house on the 231 bypass just outside of town. It was a particularly difficult time for everyone, especially when my precious dog Lady was killed by a truck on the busy highway. Adjusting to a new school was also hard for me and I don't think my father generally liked working in that district, although I'm not sure. My brother and I were doing well academically. I was the top math student in my class and he was making good grades in his 2nd year at the University of Alabama. Two years later he would become the first member in the Williams family line to graduate from a university. About a year after we moved to Troy a position came open with the insurance company's district office in Dothan and my father took that job, again as an associate manager, in 1967. It was to be his last transfer. He would retire in Dothan after 30 years with the same company.

Dothan was a city of about 50,000 and had one of the largest high schools in the state. The city was known as "The Peanut Capitol of the World" because it was home to one of the largest peanut processing companies in the state and peanuts were a



Undated photograph of the farmer, soldier, baseball player, insurance manager, Sunday School teacher, husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.

large agricultural product in the area. They also had a "National Peanut Festival" each year. Many other agricultural products were also grown there in the "Wiregrass" area. Although Dothan was a well-known farming hub, it was also a very modern city. It had a four-lane bypass built in a circle around the perimeter of the city. We rented a house inside the circle, just off of West

Main Street, for a year. The address was 1910 Van Buren Street. Then my mother and father built yet another brick home in the suburbs at 402 Whatley Drive. They would live in that home for 42 years and then die in their bedroom—within eight months of

“Ottis T. Williams
President 1970-71
Dothan Association of Life Underwriters”



each other.

My father really hit his stride when he went to work in Dothan. He had already built a reputation as a good recruiter and teacher of young insurance salesmen. I was one of those young salesmen. The summer after my first year at the University of Alabama I went to work for Liberty National in their student program and was assigned to the district in Thomasville, Georgia. The mathematical part of the insurance business came easy to me. So explaining financial figures to families was something I picked up quickly. But it was my father's instruction, both in how to show genuine interest in people and how to determine which products were best for them, that served me best. In the 10 weeks that I was in the Thomasville office I rose from the bottom of the salesboard to the top 5. All of the other men in that district office were seasoned professionals.

In 1970 my father was elected President of the Dothan Association of Life Underwriters. In 1978 he retired after 30 years with the same company that first employed him when he came out of the Army back in 1948. My brother and I attended his retirement banquet and sat with him at the head of the table. It was special for me because I was employed in Mobile, Al., as a full time agent with the same company at that time. Just a few months prior to my father's retirement I won the Honor Agent award which was presented annually to the top new agent in the entire company. I was proud to sit beside my father on that day, both of us having been commended for excellent service to the company and to our customers.

The company that my father worked for held a convention each year for their top performing agents and managers and my

father, as far as I know, always qualified. This made for some extraordinary travel experiences for the couple who were raised on farms. They attended conventions in Miami, New York, the Bahamas, Caracas, New Orleans, Mexico, San Francisco, Tampa, Nashville, and other popular destinations. They began enjoying these conventions in the 50's when he was a young agent and continued to enjoy them yearly in all the years he served in management. They probably attended 28 to 30 conventions during his career. He also received a paid vacation each year and we traveled to different places. A memorable one was to Lookout Mountain in Tennessee in the early 1950's. We also visited the families of his brothers, Quinton P. and Vernon D. Williams, in Ft. Meade, Florida. And there were many fun vacations to Panama City.

Dothan was a good fit for my parents. It was the largest city they ever lived in. My mother's sister had moved there with her family a few years prior. Her name is Edith Bailey Granberry and her husband was Bobby Ray Granberry. They had two sons, Michael and David, who were a few years younger than me. Aunt Edith was an excellent sister to my mother and Uncle Bobby was a good friend to my father. Just as we had done with mother's other sister and her family in Panama City, we enjoyed some good times and good meals with the Granberrys in Dothan. The Panama City group would visit occasionally as would the other relatives from Brantley.



Attending a convention, probably in the early 70's



The cottage at Gantt Lake near Andalusia

In 1971, just over three years after moving to Dothan, my father bought a small cottage on Gantt Lake, which was only nine miles from Andalusia and about a two hour drive from Dothan. Having grown up in Andalusia, we had been there many times to fish and water ski. The cottage was in a beautiful location and had two fishing piers. My parents spent many relaxing weekends there. "Relaxing" for them meant working in the yards and fishing. They bought a deep freezer and kept it stocked with fresh vegetables from the garden in Dothan. We all had some good times there. But probably the best times for them were the times when their grandson stayed with them there when he was a very young boy. We called it "Paw Paw's big pond". My parents also had fun hosting visits from both the Williams and Bailey families.

Chapter 9: A 30 Year Retirement Follows the 30 Year Career

In 1972 I entered the University of Alabama as a freshman and my brother was in his first year of law school there. Our parents would visit us for college football games and other things. I would almost always visit them on holidays. It was special going home to see them in Dothan. My mother was an awesome cook and we always had fresh vegetables from the garden.

This biography is jumping around a little now but it has to be that way because my father's retirement covered a span of 30 years. I don't want to leave out something extremely important that happened in 1982. I had a spinal disc injury that possibly originally occurred as far back as 1963 when I was 14 years old. It wasn't terrible and didn't really slow me down or cause any serious problems. But in 1982 the disk at L2/L3 in my back slipped into my spinal canal. It was probably due to a series of small stresses that had recently occurred without incident. But this time the nerve roots were damaged and I was paralyzed from the waist down. My wonderful surgeon, Dr. William Bridges, cut out part of the disc but could only give me a 15% chance of ever walking again without some sort of prosthetic device. Of course my parents and my girlfriend, Shirley Loewen, were there with me in Mobile when the surgery took place at Mobile Infirmary. Shirley was an angel to me throughout the whole experience and a great comfort to my parents. I want to say something about both my mother and my father. First, you have to realize the kind of mother I had. She was the type who would prefer to be having the surgery herself than one of her boys. She would have traded places with me in that wheel chair if she could have done that. That being said, I'll never forget what she said to me in the hospital after the surgery. After the surgeon had told us the paralysis might be permanent I think I had asked her why this had to happen to me. I expected her to tell me everything was going to be OK, not to worry, or something else to soothe my state of mind. But she said, "Ricky, God doesn't make any mistakes". Eventually I regained full use of my legs and went on with my life. I had many people praying for me, including my relatives. And my mother went to her Sunday School class at First Baptist Church of Dothan and had that group of sweet ladies praying like the end of the world was near! You would normally describe my mother with words like soft-spoken, reserved, kind, humble, and submissive. But if her husband or one of her boys was in trouble she would tear the teeth out of a gorilla to help them.

My father, on the other hand, was a guy who was very tough on the inside. He would drive me to and from the physical rehab center each day and take care of things at my house, as he and my mother were staying there with me in the weeks after the surgery. He also helped out at a small business that I had at the time. But there's one thing I'll never forget about my father. At a time when I couldn't walk from my bedroom to my bathroom, ***my father at age 63 would carry me.***

Throughout his retirement, my father taught Sunday School at the First Baptist Church of Dothan.



Christmas at the Granberry Home in Dothan, circa 2005: From Right: Jeffrey Cornett, Rick Williams, Mattie Pearl Williams, Ottis Williams, George H. Cornett, Bobby Granberry, Edith Granberry, David Granberry, Lisa Cornett Wright, Tommy Wright, Lisa's 2 Sons and Daughter



Ottis and Mattie Pearl Williams, on right, during their retirement years with good friends from Dothan, Waymon and Lilla Faulk. circa 2000

My father had made a good choice when he bought that lot at 402 Whatley Drive, Dothan, Alabama. Urban sprawl had not yet hit Dothan and the lot was about an acre in size. When my father retired in 1978, he found more time to work in his yards at both Dothan and Gantt. Always the farmer, he planted a large garden with rows of corn, tomatoes, beans, peas, okra, peanuts, squash, and collards, among other things. He had large and productive blueberry and scuppernon vines. My parents' farming background was in every inch of that property. There were several pecan trees on the property and they yielded excellent pecans almost every year. I'm pretty sure that my parents planted those trees when they first moved there. You would often see my parents shelling peas and cracking pecans. They would always have fresh vegetables on the dining tables even during the winters. They were both experts at canning and putting up vegetables and fruits. My mother would can the most delicious creamed corn in the South. After growing it fresh in the garden, the two of them would shuck it, boil it, and then cut the kernels off the cobs. Mother would then add just the exact right amount of bacon grease, salt, and pepper, and they would freeze enough to last all year. This is an example of how good that creamed corn was: At Thanksgiving my mother would cook turkey, ham, butter beans, peas, fried corn bread, green bean casserole, sweet potato casserole, turnips, giblets and gravy, congealed salad, sweet tea, pound cake, pecan pie, blueberry cobbler, and more. The garden tomatoes were always on the table. But even with all that, I would sometimes eat two servings of her creamed corn before I would even put anything else on my plate. It was just that good!

They also had a nice gold fish pool close to the patio and a bluebird house in the garden. Dothan was a beautiful city with an annual Azaela Trail event, but you would have been hard pressed to find flowers in that southern city that were more beautiful than my mother's. Her favorites were hydrangeas and she grew them in several rich colors. She also had many roses, pansies, gardenias, dahlias, delphiniums, lilies, gladioli, orchids, and tulips. Their home was trimmed with hedges and flower beds. My father was always ready to help my mother with any of the harder work. He built her a greenhouse on the side of an outside storage room and she grew seedlings in there and potted plants. It was equipped with a fluorescent light and electric heater for the winter months. The annual routine of putting all of my mother's potted plants in the greenhouse was not to be taken lightly.

You can see many of these things I've just mentioned on the following page. It displays a composite of photographs which I took Easter weekend, 2000.

This concludes the chapter on the years after my father retired. There is much more information that I hope to add in a revision at a later date.

A collage of various garden and nature photos from 2000. The central text "EASTER 2000" is written in a red, serif font. The collage includes several photographs: a large pink rose in the top left; a woman in a blue and pink jacket working in a garden; a man in a white shirt and dark pants standing next to a pond; a small white house with a porch; a large pink rose in the bottom left; a red tulip in the bottom center; a yellow daisy in the bottom right; a purple flower in the top right; a blue bird on a fence in the bottom right; a small white birdhouse on a post on the left; and a small pond with a waterfall in the center right. The photos are arranged in a collage style with some overlapping and soft edges.

A collage of various photographs from 2000, including flowers, a woman, a man, a house, and a pond, with the word 'EASTER' and the year '2000' overlaid. The collage features several images of flowers, including a large pink rose in the top left, purple flowers in the top right, a red daisy in a circular inset on the right, and a large pink rose in the bottom left. A woman in a blue and pink jacket is shown in the center, and a man in a white shirt and dark pants is in the bottom right. A white house with a porch is in the middle, and a pond with koi fish is in the top right. The word 'EASTER' is written in red in the top left, and '2000' is written in red in the center.

EASTER

2000

Chapter 10: A Grandson Brings Years of Happiness

Sometime around 1981, about 4 years after my father retired, a major event happened in my parents' lives. My brother and his wife adopted a baby boy two days after his birth and named him Weston Tate Williams. They were living in Tuscaloosa. Although Tuscaloosa was four hours away, my brother and his wife were very generous to bring West to Dothan and let him stay with my parents fairly often. I remember those visits as being some of the happiest times my parents ever had. And I'll say that West totally adored them. He was a vibrant, happy, dimple-cheeked heart-throb of a little boy. His personality was polite, but also mischievous.



Weston Tate Williams
at about 6 months.



Wes at about 4 years.



Wes at about 7 years.



Wes at about age 4
with his mom and dad.



Wes at about age 4
clowning with his uncle Rick.



Wes at about 8 years.

All Photos This Chapter:
Rick Williams



Wes at about age 3
sitting in his grandfather's
wheelbarrow
playing with his grandfather's hat.
Dothan, Alabama



Wes at about age 4
eagerly watching his grandmother
bake a cake at Gantt Lake.



Wes at about age 4
being entertained by
his grandfather at Gantt Lake.

Eventually the cute grandson grew up and became a soldier. Wes graduated from the University of Alabama's ROTC program where he was a state champion smallbore rifle shooter. It was also in those ROTC classes that he met another cadet, Crystal Keck, who became his wife. Although Crystal was from Tampa and Wes from Tuscaloosa, they were married in Mobile, Alabama. It was a more convenient location for their friends, who would have to drive from Florida, Alabama, and other areas. There was also a good photographer there by the name of Rick Williams! They were married at the Bragg-Mitchell Mansion which was one of the most beautiful wedding venues in the south. Their rehearsal dinner was at the Athleston Club in downtown Mobile. My photography assistant had a great time photographing that beautiful wedding. There were about 20 bridesmaids and groomsmen. Below are some family photos from the wedding day.



Above from left: Rick Williams, Ottis Williams, Mattie Pearl Williams, Crystal Keck Williams, Wes Williams, Nancy Williams, Wayne Williams



Far left: Rick, Wayne, Wes, and Ottis Williams
Near left: The soldier and his father



Left: The beautiful couple on the veranda of the Bragg-Mitchell Mansion on their wedding day.

Right: A few years later in Ft. Campbell, NC., with daughters Anabelle and Catarina. The grandparents were able to hold Catarina as a baby before they passed away in 2008/2009.



The cute grandson soon became a gallant war hero. Upon graduating from the University of Alabama, Wes commissioned from the University's ROTC program as an Infantry Officer 2nd Lieutenant. In route to his first duty assignment, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division, Wes graduated from airborne and the coveted Army Ranger School. Upon graduation he deployed with the 101st to Operation Iraqi Freedom where he served as an Infantry Platoon leader. Following his time in the 101st, Wes was selected to attend the Special Forces Qualification Course. Once selected, he endured the rigorous two year path to earn his Green Beret.

His next assignment was with the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) where he served as a commander on multiple Operational Detachment Alphas (ODA) and deployed numerous times to Iraq to support the Transition of Iraq Campaign, Iraqi Governance Campaign, Iraqi Surge Campaign, Iraqi Sovereignty Campaign, and Operation New Dawn.

For his valor in combat Wes was awarded two United States Army Bronze Medals.

After his ODA time he pinned the rank of Major on his chest and attended the Army's Command General Staff College (CGSC) in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where he additionally earned an MBA from Central Michigan University. After graduating from CGSC, Wes assumed Company Command of Charlie Company, 6th Special Activities Battalion at Ft Bragg, NC. Directly following his command time Wes deployed to the Arabian Peninsula as a strategic planner for Special Operations Command Yemen. Upon his return to the states, he served as the Special Activities Battalions Operations Officer overseeing all special activities throughout the Special Operations Forces.

In the interview for this biography, Wessaid that “the drive and determination which helped me rise through the ranks and servemy country on the battle field wereinstilled in me at an early age”and “good family role models along with greatfamily valuesfrom my childhood set me on a great path to adult success”.

Chapter 11: Two Sons Choose Different Paths

The story of my father's life would not be complete without including the lives and careers of his two sons. My brother, Wayne Lavon Williams, was raised with stricter discipline than me. My father, at that time, was only a few years removed from the hard times of his own childhood. Although he was probably very strict in the way he raised Wayne, my brother benefitted tremendously from that. Wayne was always an overachiever, even as a child. His birthday was September 2nd, which was at the cut-off for starting school each year at that time. That meant he was always the youngest child in his class and most of the other boys were larger and more mature physically. But that never got in his way of anything. He was a competitor in everything he did. My parents taught him high values. They wanted him to do well academically so he could go to college, something they never would have had the opportunity to do. I'm sure my father wanted him to be a good baseball player. He got his wish because Wayne was an Allstar 2nd baseman in Little League and Babe Ruth League and was a two year starter at 2nd base for the Andalusia High School Bulldogs. Although small for his age he was an excellent football player, starting 2 years at Andalusia High School as a defensive back and lettering three years at the same position. This was not a small honor back then. The high school football players in Andalusia were celebrities not only at school but in the community. Every Thursday night during football season the town would hold a pep rally in the town square and the streets would be packed. The band and cheerleaders were there and there was a stage set up where some of the players would be introduced and even make speeches. Wayne was also a starting guard on the basketball team. I think he lettered 3 years in football, basketball, track, and tennis. He made a 26 on his ACT score and was admitted to The University of Alabama in 1963.

Some kids who are the first member of a family clan to go to college would be intimidated or lacking in confidence. But not Wayne. He hit the ground running in Tuscaloosa, the city that would be his home for the rest of his life. Although there was little money available to be in a social fraternity, he highly valued Greek life and took part-time jobs to make it happen. He was a member of the first pledge class of Beta Theta Pi. By the time he graduated they were a well-known and respected fraternity. Wayne was elected as an officer in the fraternity and then ran and was elected as an officer in the Student Government Association. When he graduated from the School of Business in 1966 he intended to work as an actuary, but the faculty at the University of Alabama School of Law contacted him and asked him to apply to Law School. The rest is history. He had found a profession that perfectly suited him. After graduation he went to work for the largest law firm in Tuscaloosa and was soon appointed as the District Attorney of Tuscaloosa County. My parents



Wayne, Wes, and Nancy Williams
Christmas 1990

have newspaper photos of him with Senator John Sparkman and Governor George Wallace. After returning to private practice and opening his own firm he won the largest tort settlement in Tuscaloosa history. My parents had a copy of a check made out to him for a million dollars.

Also notable is his closer relationship with Alabama athletics. He and his wife Nancy are long-time season ticket holders for Alabama Football and Alabama Basketball, as well as big fans of Alabama baseball. He has represented a number of Alabama football stars who were in need of legal help and he has been commended by the athletics department and rewarded with on-field passes. He and Nancy have been guests at the Alabama Football Awards Banquet. He was probably the de facto attorney for Alabama athletes during the Nick Saban era of Alabama football.

I am nothing like my brother, although I acquired some of his competitiveness. It couldn't be any other way growing up as his brother. I also loved sports growing up and played on school teams into the 10th grade. The high school I attended in Dothan in the 11th and 12th grades was three times larger than the high school I would have attended in Andalusia and there were three times as many athletes. I did compete well academically and made a 29 on my ACT test out of a possible 32. In a class of 314 there were only 4 scores higher than mine. I was on the math team my senior year at Dothan High School and when we competed in a state tournament in Birmingham I made the highest score of anyone from my school—even higher than our valedictorian and salutatorian. I enrolled at the University of Alabama in 1968 and also pledged Beta Theta Pi. I had poor grades the first two years because I was a late bloomer and just had too much fun. My junior year I entered a pre-med curriculum and made excellent grades. I entered graduate school at The University of Alabama in Birmingham and received my Master's Degree in Human Physiology. After graduation, I sold laboratory equipment for six months for a company called Neotec Electronics which was headquartered in Silver Spring, Maryland. Their computerized grain analyzers, which were basically scanning, infrared spectrophotometers, sold poorly at that time so I moved to Mobile, Alabama, to take a job as an agent with Liberty National Life, the same company that my father was working for. I had worked for them on student summer program in Thomasville, Georgia. The Mobile district was one of the top three districts in the company and I had a tough boss named Bob Henderson. I was assigned a lower priority community area in which to work but still won the company-wide award as the top new salesman that year, ie the Honor Agent Award. Selling came easy to me and I was a hard worker. Eventually I realized that an insurance career was not for me and I took a job as a stock broker with Bache Securities. They sent me to their home office on Wall Street in New York City for a month to study for my securities license and a month later I made the highest score on the securities licensing exam that had ever been made by anyone from Mobile at that time. But I didn't do very well as a broker. The only thing I did well was lose money for my clients! However, that was at a time when the DJII bottomed out at a historic low of about 600. So after two years I bought a small neigh-



Rick Williams
Christmas 1990

a

borhood bar called "The Blarney Stone" and converted it into a nightclub that I called "The Timbers". That was a bad idea. Please read my own biography for more information on that comical lost venture. When I was in graduate school at UAB I dated another student, Janice Drummond, who loved photography. She helped me cultivate an interest in a hobby which was to become my lifetime profession. When I started with the brokerage firm I also started doing photography on the side. After selling the nightclub in 1983 I opened a photography studio in Bel Air Mall in Mobile and named it Four Seasons Photography.

Thus began a 30 year career as a studio photographer. Bel Air Mall was the largest retail mall in Alabama at that time and my business grew rapidly. Having never had extreme success at anything I really enjoyed, I found myself in photography. I don't really know why but when I looked through a camera I could almost always see something beautiful. This is my father's biography so I won't go into detail but I eventually had great success photographing babies, children, high school seniors, and, to a lesser extent, weddings. In 1993 I built a fabulous studio not far from the mall on Cottage Hill Road. It had a 1200 foot state-of-the-art camera room and beautiful outdoor facilities. In 2003 I won a competition and was named High School Senior Portrait Photographer of the Year by The Professional Photographers of America. I had 5 excellent ladies working for me at that time and we were doing such a large volume of business that I bought a new, silver halide processing lab printer for almost \$100,000, the type machine which had never been used in Alabama by carriage trade studios. It was a wonderful career with tons of excitement and many other rewards. I probably photographed more people than any other carriage trade photographer in the history of Alabama and never tired of it until I moved to Gulf Shores in 2013.

I've included all of this information about my brother and me only because our parents loved us and wanted us to do well in life. They both came from difficult circumstances and they sacrificed to help us in any way they could. There was a conflict between my father and my brother at one time but I think they worked through that. My father was very proud of both of us and we were very proud of him.

Chapter 12: The Latter Years

In late 2005 or early 2006 my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease, an affliction which also occurred in other members of the Bailey family, including her mother. There was a period of about a year when she could still function well but could not cook and do similar activities and only had minor problems with her memory. I'm grateful that she was able to visit me twice in my new home in Gulf Shores, Alabama, when she could still understand and enjoy things. One day she was standing in my backyard talking to my dear friend and employee, Vickie Smith, when, upon seeing me out on my pier, she turned to Vickie, smiled, and said, in her sweet way, "Ricky is going to love living here."

It was also during that visit that my mother, father, brother, and I came together again one last time before they both fell terminally ill. And my mother was able to do one of her favorite things--fish! She caught several small fish off of my pier that day and was smiling and laughing and loving being with her husband and boys, just as she had done so many times before. Below are some pictures taken by a neighbor who happened to notice us out there.



June 16, 2007

My father was still in good health, but caring for someone with Alzheimer's is sometimes called "the 24 hour day". My brother and I knew that this could be the beginning of the end, but we didn't realize that they would both be gone in just over two years. My father had a tumor on his kidney which doctors had been

monitoring for 10 years. At some point cancer began to spread in his body, probably either from the kidney tumor or from his colon. In August, 2008, the doctors removed the kidney and 18 inches of the tumor. He survived the surgery but didn't survive the cancer. He passed away on October 15, 2008. Our mother passed away eight months later on June 12th, 2009.

My mother's sister, Edith Granberry, and her husband, Bobby Granberry, were on vacations in distant states when both of my parents passed away but they graciously returned to Dothan to help us in those final days. My Aunt Edith was a special blessing because she would help with her sister in ways that would have been difficult for my brother and I. And her husband Bobby was always ready to help, just as he had always been in years past. One thing that was very special to us was the visit from my mother's sister and sister-in-laws. As was the custom in the Bailey family, they came to our house the day before my father died and spent the night as a comfort to my mother. Edith was there as well as Margie Nell Bailey and Queenie Bailey, who were the wives of my mother's brothers. With the bedrooms full, I remember them sleeping just sitting in chairs! Only one other aunt was unable to come due to her medical situation.

Around 2005, John and Mott Smith had moved in next door to my parents. They were about my age and they immediately became good friends of my parents. John and Mott helped with many things during those eight months when we lost our parents and my parents were blessed to have them as dear friends.

There was a circumstance of their deaths which was just amazing. In my father's final days we placed a hospital bed beside their bed in their bedroom and he died on that bed. In my mother's final days we placed a similar bed in a different bedroom because it was more convenient for an in-home caregiver whom we had employed. But at the very end, for some forgotten reason, we moved that bed back into my parents bedroom in the same place where the other hospital bed had been when my father passed away. So my mother passed away in the bedroom they had slept in for 42 years—in the same location where my father had passed away. ***After 65 years of marriage, my parents ascended into Heaven from the very same air space beside their bed. I like to believe that they went to Heaven holding hands!***

Ottis Tascal Williams and Mattie Pearl Williams are buried beside each other in The Brantley Cemetery, Brantley, Alabama.

Afterthoughts

Although most of this biography was a record of the life of Ottis T. Williams, there was, of necessity, much overlap into the life of his wife, Mattie Pearl Williams. When I soon write her biography, I will duplicate several of these chapters since their lives were essentially joined for so many years.

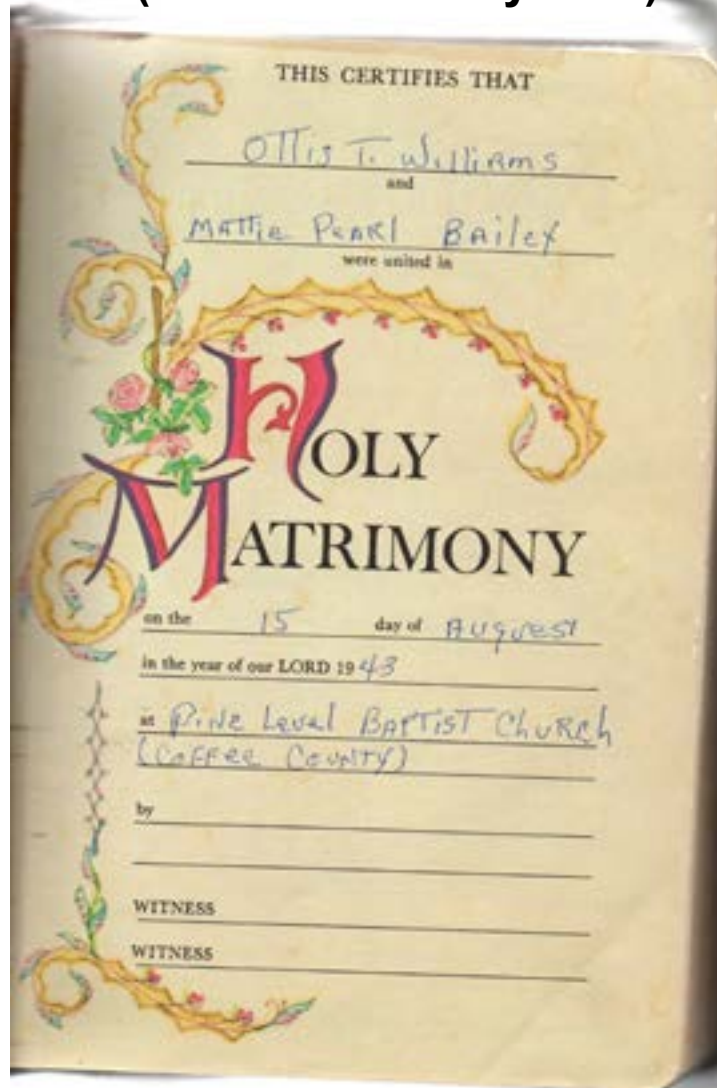
I also have several digital videos and 8 mm films which I will include in future revisions. Additionally, I'm optimistic that my uncles, aunts, and cousins will make contributions to those revisions by submitting first-hand accounts of things they remember about my parents.

This biography has been a journey through my soul. There were things lost in the recesses of my mind which, when combined with old photographs, brought a better understanding of who my parents were and what their lives were really like. For example, I never realized how pretty my mother was when she married my father, not until I looked at those photos of her with him in uniform and the photo of her holding her first baby in her lap. She had beautiful, long hair and a beautiful face. My father must have been proud as he could be to have someone like her for a wife. There was a love story that I never knew, and I don't think most of my relatives knew it either. But it was there. I could see it in the pictures and read it in my mother's diary.

I hope my cousins will consider biographies of their parents as well. I know there are amazing love stories in the early lives of their parents also. We tend not to look at the romantic side of our parents, but it's a beautiful and peaceful experience when we are able to read those stories and see our parents at the time when they first fell in love.

Section 2: Documents and Additional Photographs

Marriage Record (Found in A Family Bible)



(Special Notation: His middle name on this certificate is spelled "Taskel", but my recollection is that he spelled it "Tascal". He had an older brother named Quinton Pascal Williams and a younger brother named Ivey Bascal Williams)

SIGNATURE OF REGISTRAR

OCTOBER 21, 2008

DATE OF ISSUE

ALABAMA
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

Date of Death 101

1. DECEASED NAME Ottis Taskel WILLIAMS		2. DATE OF DEATH October 15, 2008		3. PLACE OF DEATH Houston	
4. CITY, TOWN, OR VILLAGE OF DEATH AND ZIP CODE DOTHAN 36301		5. MARRIAGE STATUS Yes		6. PLACE OF BIRTH - (Specify if other than place of death) 402 Whatley Dr.	
7. A. SEX Male		B. RACE White		C. DEDUCED AGE 12	
8. A. AGE 89		B. DATE OF BIRTH September 3, 1919		C. DECEASED SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER 416-28-0616	
9. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
10. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
11. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
12. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
13. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
14. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
15. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
16. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
17. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
18. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
19. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
20. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
21. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
22. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
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24. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
25. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
26. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
27. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
28. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
29. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
30. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
31. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
32. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
33. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
34. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
35. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
36. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
37. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
38. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
39. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
40. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
41. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
42. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
43. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
44. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
45. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
46. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		C. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama	
47. A. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama		B. DECEASED'S PLACE OF BIRTH Alabama			

The scribbled note “Not Right” is by me. My father died of brain cancer. His first symptoms were an aching pain in his back. I think the doctors later found that he may have had colon cancer which had spread first to his spine, and then to his brain. There was a tumor on his kidney which we had monitored for 10 years. Two months before his death, surgeons removed that kidney and 18 inches of his GI tract.

Rick Williams

Andalusia, Ala.
June 6, 1950

This agreement is entered into between O.T. Williams, hereafter called the owner, and B.S. Weed, thereafter called the contractor.

The contractor will furnish all labor and material in connection with the construction of a house according to the plans and specifications approved by the Veteran's Administration for the sum of Nine Thousand Three Hundred Fifty & no/100 - - - - - (\$9,350.00.) with the exception of the light fixtures and hot water heater which are to be furnished by the owner.

It is further agreed and understood that the contractor will carry all necessary insurance in connection with this contract to protect him and the owner.

Payments are to be to the contractor by the owner as work is completed and as agreeable to the bank.

O.T. Williams
Owner

B.S. Weed
Contractor

Contractor's Agreement for the construction of the first home of Ottis and Mattie Pearl Williams in Elba, Alabama. Dated June 6, 1950. This was seven months after the birth of their 2nd son, Ricky Williams. Note the price of \$9,350 for labor and materials. It was a 3 bedroom, 2 bath home with a garage.

193 853

THE STATE OF ALABAMA, HOUSTON COUNTY

Notary Public

In and for said County, I hereby certify that Elizabeth Gay Hooks, wife of Cary S. Hooks,

whose name is signed to the foregoing conveyance, and who is known to me, acknowledged before me on this day that being informed of the contents of the conveyance he executed the same voluntarily on the day the same were acknowledged before me.

Given under my hand, this 3rd day of April, 1967.

My commission expires

Notary Public, Georgia State at Large

My Commission Expires

THE STATE OF ALABAMA, HOUSTON COUNTY

Notary Public

Cary S. Hooks, husband of Elizabeth Gay Hooks, whose name is signed to the foregoing conveyance, and who is known to me, acknowledged before me on this day that being informed of the contents of the conveyance he executed the same voluntarily on the day the same were acknowledged before me.

In witness whereof I hereunto set my hand, this 3rd day of April, 1967.

My commission expires

Notary Public, Georgia State at Large

My Commission Expires

THE STATE OF ALABAMA Houston County

FROM Elizabeth Gay Hooks and Cary S. Hooks

TO 3-11-67 11:41 AM 1967

WARRANTY DEED

Received this 3rd day of April, 1967, at 11:41 AM, 1967, for \$57,000.00, Cary S. Hooks and Elizabeth Gay Hooks, husband and wife, of the County of Houston, State of Alabama, to and for the use of the said Cary S. Hooks and Elizabeth Gay Hooks, the following described land, to wit:

Lot 15, Block 1, Subdivision 1, of the 1st Addition to the City of Dothan, in the County of Houston, State of Alabama, containing 0.15 acres, more or less, as shown on the plat of subdivision filed for record in the Office of the County Clerk of Houston County, Alabama, on 11/15/66.

Witness my hand and seal, this 3rd day of April, 1967.

Notary Public, Georgia State at Large

My Commission Expires

Deed for 402 Whatley Drive, Dothan, Alabama.
Dated April 3, 1967.

Cost of House 14,506⁰⁰
Lot 1,500⁰⁰
Room 1,100⁰⁰

17,106⁰⁰

Less Heat 315⁰⁰
Land Survey 225⁰⁰
Legal 114⁰⁰

17,760⁰⁰

11 mo rent on house
Less Cost 1199.00

17,106
315
225
114

17,760

Cost of the home my parents built in early 1967. This is my father's handwriting. The construction cost was \$14,506 and the cost of the residential lot was \$1,500. The "Room" for \$1,100 was probably the outdoor storage room used for gardening equipment and other things.

Photos of the Home in Dothan, Alabama 402 Whatley Drive, Dothan, Al. 36303

Important Notation! There's a good bit of clutter in these photos. The photographs of the interior of the house were taken six months after my parents passed away. The photographs of the exterior of the house and the yards were taken in 2016, seven years after my parents' death. My mother would NEVER have allowed the inside of their home to be littered and unkempt. She was a world-class housekeeper. My father would have never allowed their yards and shrubs to be overgrown like in the pictures—not for one day!



The den.



The den looking into the kitchen.



Grandfather clock on the mantle.



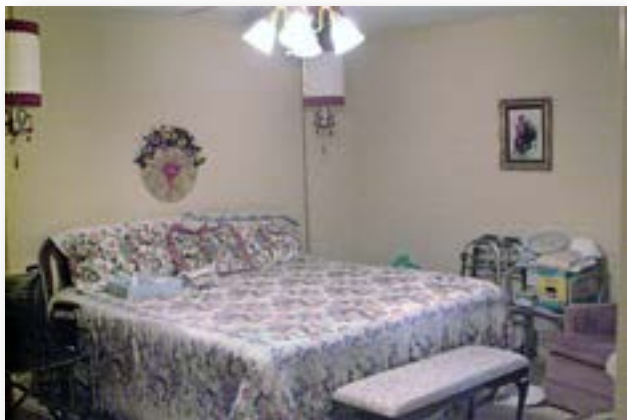
Sofa and my father's desk.



The kitchen.



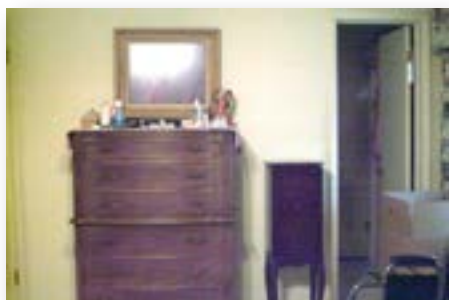
The kitchen looking into the dining room.



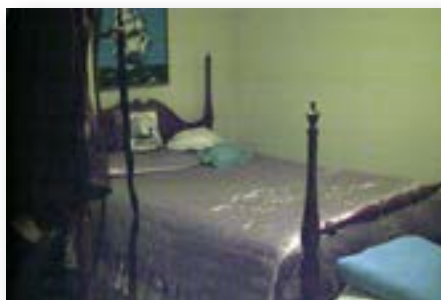
The bedroom where they slept for 42 years.



Another view of their bedroom.



Their dresser and small bath..



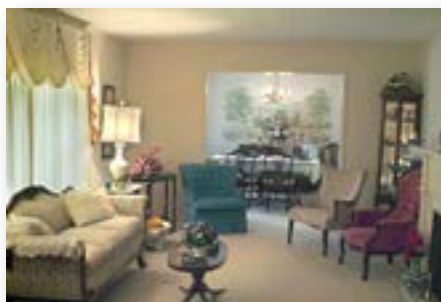
The guest bedroom with Broyhill furniture..



Hallway to the bedrooms.



The living room and front entrance foyer.



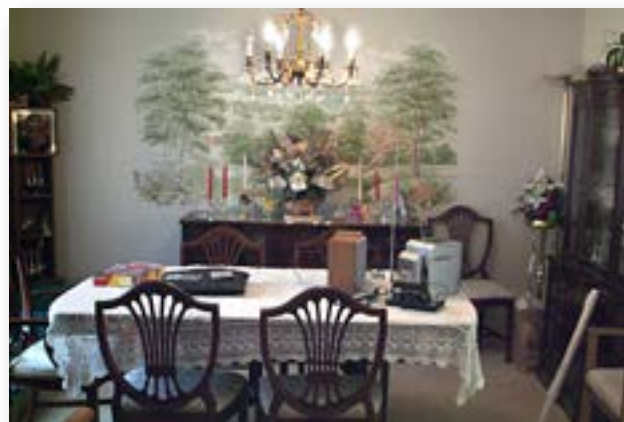
The living room looking into the dining room.



The faux fireplace in the living room.



The sofa and furniture probably purchased in the early 1960's.



The dining room table (cluttered after their deaths).



The china cabinet. The cabinet, china, and silver were probably purchased in the 1960's.



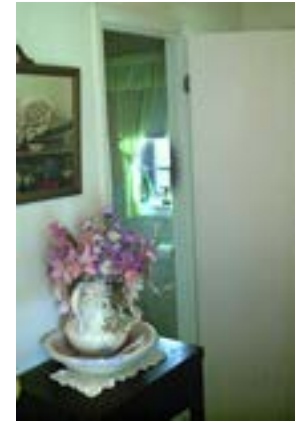
Silver dinnerware. The silver was seldom ever used but it was fashionable in that day for a home to have silver dinnerware and mahogany furniture.



A third bedroom which was my (Rick Williams) room in high school, 1967, 1968.



The hallway bathroom.



The utility room and third bathroom.

Exterior Views

These photos, taken by a landscaper seven years after my parents passed away, don't show the beauty of the yards that were so important to them. They worked in their yards and garden almost daily.





Looking through the garage
onto the covered patio.



The storage building with attached greenhouse.
The scuppernon vine is to the left.



This view, from the garden, shows only about 1/3 of the large
side yard which extends out of the photo to the right.



[illegible]

LOT 32 VALLEY OF SHILOH, GANTT, AL
Postal Address: 15122 F M JONES ROAD
ANDALUSIA, AL. 36421

Images of the Cottage on Gantt Lake Near Andalusia



